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AUTHOR Hallion, Andrea M.
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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the development of graded and non-graded classrooms in the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries and describes the implementation of multiage classrooms at an elementary school in Hopedale, Massachusetts. After defining what is meant by multiage classrooms, the paper discusses the role of Horace Mann, who was then a secretary for the Massachusetts Board of Education, in implementing the first graded classrooms in the United States in the 1840s. It also reviews early criticisms of graded education, especially those voiced by John Dewey, who felt that graded classrooms were too confining and machine-like. The paper then addresses the influences on the move back to nongraded or multiage classrooms in the late 20th century, reviews recent research on multiage instruction, and presents the educational benefits of multiage classrooms. Finally, the personal experiences of an elementary school principal responsible for the implementation of multiage classrooms at her school are presented. (MDM)

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ANDREA M. HALLION

THE FOLLOWING PAPER WAS PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS ASSOCIATION AT THEIR ANNUAL CONVENTION. THE CONVENTION, ENTITLED, "QUALITY SCHOOL LEADERS FOR SUCCESSFUL CHILDREN", WAS HELD AT THE ORANGE COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER, ORLANDO, FLORIDA, MARCH 4-9, 1994.

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STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS

IN THE ONE ROOM SCHOOL HOUSE OF YORE, THE SCHOOL MARM TAUGHT AN ASSORTMENT OF CHILDREN OF MANY AGES, STRIVING TO HELP EACH CHILD BUILD ON WHATEVER SKILLS HE OR SHE HAD.

WHILE THAT SYSTEM MAY SEEM OUTDATED, ONE OF ITS PRIME CHARACTERISTICS IS RETURNING TO FAVOR IN A GROWING NUMBER OF SCHOOLS: THE NONGRADED CLASSROOM.

I AM HERE TO TELL YOU HOW OUR SCHOOL IN HOPEDALE, MASSACHUSETTS IS MAKING THE CHANGE TO MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS. MY PROGRAM WILL TOUCH UPON:

1. INFLUENCES CONTRIBUTING TO ORGANIZING SCHOOLS BY GRADE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
2. EARLY CRITICS OF GRADED EDUCATION
3. ASSUMPTIONS AND GOALS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
4. DEFINITION OF MULTI-AGE EDUCATION
5. REASONS WHY THE FIRST WAVE OF MULTI-AGE FAILED
6. RATIONALE FOR NEW EFFORTS WITH MULTI-AGE EDUCATION
7. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT
8. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON MULTI-AGE EDUCATION
9. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH COMPARING NONGRADED AND GRADED EDUCATION
10. THE HOPEDALE JOURNEY

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DEFINITION OF A MULTI-AGE CLASSROOM

I WOULD FIRST LIKE TO TELL YOU WHAT A MULTI-AGE CLASSROOM IS : IT IS A CLASSROOM THAT HOLDS AT LEAST TWO TRADITIONAL GRADES OR AGES OF STUDENTS. THE CURRICULUM IS THEMATIC AND INTEGRATED, WHENEVER POSSIBLE. TEACHERS TEACH CHILDREN NOT SUBJECTS. EACH CHILD IS VIEWED AS AN INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS AN INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL. THE TEACHER IS VIEWED AS A FACILITATOR WHO WILL GUIDE THE STUDENT TO ACHIEVE MORE THAN HE/SHE COULD ACHIEVE ON HIS/HER OWN. CHILDREN MAKE CONTINUOUS PROGRESS. THEY ARE NOT HINDERED BY THE TRADITIONAL STRUCTURE OF GRADE LEVELS. CHILDREN WORK IN COOPERATIVE GROUPS. PEER TUTORING IS THE NORM. THEREFORE, THERE ARE AS MANY TEACHERS IN THE ROOM AS THERE ARE STUDENTS. HANDS/ON ACTIVITIES AT THE CHILD'S DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL ENHANCE THE CHANCES OF TRUE LEARNING. COOPERATIVE LEARNING GROUPS GIVE RISE TO STUDENTS' CARING ABOUT EACH OTHER WHICH ENHANCES THE CHANCES OF BETTER CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE. CLASSROOMS ARE HETEROGENEOUS BUT ABILITY GROUPS MAY BE FORMED TO TEACH SOME SPECIFIC SKILLS ASSESSMENT IS ONGOING AND AUTHENTIC IN THAT TEACHERS LOOK AT THE CHILD'S REAL WORK AND TALK WITH THE CHILD INDIVIDUALLY TO SEE WHAT HE/SHE TRULY KNOWS. REPORTING TO PARENTS IS DONE BEST IN A CONFERENCE SETTING SHARING THE CHILD'S PORTFOLIO OR COLLECTION OF WORK. THE WHOLE CHILD IS CONSIDERED AND NURTURED.

INFLUENCES CONTRIBUTING TO ORGANIZING SCHOOLS BY GRADE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

QUINCY GRAMMAR SCHOOL IN BOSTON, MA OPENED ITS DOORS IN 1848 THE FIRST GRADED PUBLIC SCHOOL IN THE COUNTRY.

HORACE MANN, SECRETARY OF THE MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF EDUCATION VISITED PRUSSIA IN 1843 AND RETURNED WITH THE NOTION THAT OUR ONE ROOM SCHOOL HOUSE WAS INEFFICIENT IN LIGHT OF PRUSSIA'S VERY PROGRESSIVE GRADED SYSTEM OF EDUCATION.

THE GRADED STRUCTURE SEEMED TO BE A GOOD WAY TO EDUCATE THE MANY IMMIGRANTS POURING INTO THE COUNTRY AT THE TIME.

MANN LIKED WHAT HE SAW IN THE GERMAN SCHOOLS: THEY WERE USED TO PROMOTE NATIONALISM, THEY OPERATED EFFICIENTLY, TEACHERS RECEIVED TRAINING, THERE WAS CENTRAL CONTROL, THEY USED MODERN METHODS, AND THEY WERE WELL ORGANIZED.

HE INCORPORATED SIMILAR ELEMENTS INTO THE WAY HE STRUCTURED THE MASSACHUSETTS' SCHOOLS. THIS SERVED US WELL AT THE TIME.

THE STRUCTURE WAS BASED ON THE FACTORY MODEL JUST AS THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION WAS TAKING HOLD.

ANOTHER INFLUENCE ON GRADED EDUCATION WAS THE RISE OF THE TEXTBOOK. THE McGUFFEY ECLECTIC READERS WERE FIRST SEEN IN 1836. THEY WE[illegible]THE FIRST TEXTBOOKS THAT WERE GRADED THROUGH SIX LEVELS. THEY WERE BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATED, AND A HUGE SUCCESS. THEY GAVE RISE TO TEXTBOOKS IN OTHER SUBJECTS.

IN TIME, THESE TEXTBOOKS BECAME THE CURRICULUM. TEACHERS AND PARENTS ALIKE CAME TO EQUATE ADEQUACY OF PUPIL PERFORMANCE WITH ABILITY TO USE THE BOOK DESIGNATED FOR THE CHILD'S GRADE LEVEL.

PRIOR TO THIS TIME TEACHERS DID NOT RECEIVE FORMAL TRAINING. NORMAL SCHOOLS WERE ESTABLISHED TO TRAIN TEACHERS IN TEACHING METHODS.

BY 1860, THE GRADED SYSTEM HAD BEEN WIDELY ADOPTED, ESPECIALLY IN THE CITIES. IT LOOKED VERY MUCH LIKE IT LOOKS TODAY. HOWEVER, DOES THE REST OF SOCIETY LOOK THE WAY IT LOOKED DURING THE TIME OF THE CIVIL WAR?

EARLY CRITICS OF GRADED EDUCATION

EDUCATORS BEGAN QUESTIONING THE MERITS OF GRADED SCHOOLS ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AFTER THEY WERE INSTITUTED. THE HUE AND CRY SEEMED TO BE SUMMED UP IN THIS SIMPLE SENTENCE, "THE STEREOTYPED PATTERN OF THE GRADED SCHOOL SYSTEM DEMANDS A STEREOTYPED INDIVIDUAL AS LEARNER."

GREAT PHILOSOPHERS, PSYCHOLOGISTS, MEDICAL DOCTORS AND THINKERS CONTRIBUTED TO THE BASIC BELIEFS OF THE NONGRADED PHILOSOPHY. AMONG THEM ARE:

FREIDERICK FROEBEL(1887)- THE "FATHER OF KINDERGARTEN," WHO URGED A GREATER FREEDOM TO INVESTIGATE AND EXPERIMENT.

JOHN LOCKE (1892)- WHO FIRST EMPHASIZED THE VALUE OF CURIOSITY AND SPONTANEOUS PLAY.

J.H. PESTALOZZI (1894)- WHO ARGUED FOR A GREATER USE OF ALL OF THE SENSES.

JEAN ROUSSEAU (1911)- WHOSE WORK GAVE A NEW DIGNITY AND RESPECT FOR CHILDHOOD AND THE VERY NATURE OF THE CHILD.

MARIA MONTESSORI (1911)-WHOSE ENTIRE EARLY WORK WAS BASED ON HER CONVICTION THAT THE FREEDOM TO EXPLORE LED NATURALLY TO PURPOSEFUL LEARNING ON THE CHILD'S OWN TERMS AND THAT STRENGTH OF PERSONALITY AND SENSE OF COMPETENCE WERE THE ONLY ESSENTIALS IN THE EARLY YEARS.

DR. BENJAMIN SPOCK (1946)- WHO URGED SCHOOLS TO ALLOW THE CHILD TO LEARN IN HIS OWN WAY AND TIME.

ANNA FREUD (1964)- WHO CONTRIBUTED SIGNIFICANT INSIGHT INTO THE BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF GROUPING CHILDREN IN WIDER RATHER THAN MORE NARROW, HOMOGENOUS AGE GROUPS.

JOHN HOLT (1964)- WHO ATTACKED THE STATUS QUO WITH THE PRECEPT THAT WHERE LEARNING IS PIECEMEAL AND LACKING IN CONTINUITY, FAILURE AND LOSS OF SELF ESTEEM IS OFTEN THE RESULT.

PROBABLY THE BEST KNOWN CRITIC OF THE GRADED SCHOOLS IN THE EARLY PART OF THIS CENTURY WAS JOHN DEWEY(1911). KNOWN AS THE "FATHER OF PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION", HE FELT SCHOOLS HAD BECOME TOO "MACHINE LIKE".

HE ARGUED THAT SCHOOLS SHOULD BE ORGANIZED AROUND THE WAY STUDENTS LEARN. STUDENTS LEARN BEST WHEN THEY ARE DOING RELATIVE TASKS.

CHILDREN SHOULD BE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS NOT PASSIVE LISTENERS.

SCHOOLS SHOULD RESPECT AND RECOGNIZE EACH CHILD'S INDIVIDUALITY AS A LEARNER.

SCHOOLS SHOULD NURTURE, AND VALUE CREATIVITY.

SCHOOLS SHOULD BE CHARACTERIZED BY PROJECTS OR UNITS RATHER THAN LESSONS.

EVALUATION SHOULD BE BASED MORE ON THE CHILD'S ABILITY TO PROBLEM-SOLVE THAN ON ROTE MEMORIZATION AND FEEDBACK

HOWEVER, DEWEY'S PHILOSOPHY OF SCHOOL, WHICH WAS DESIGNED TO PROMOTE A BETTER SOCIAL ORDER, WITH SOCIAL PROBLEMS AS ITS SUBJECT MATTER AND PROBLEM-SOLVING AS ITS METHOD, WAS NOT EASILY ADAPTED TO A GRADED STRUCTURE.

ASSUMPTIONS AND GOALS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

NOW IN THE 1990'S, ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AFTER THE QUINCY GRAMMAR SCHOOL OPENED ITS DOORS, THE TIME MAY BE RIGHT TO DO AWAY WITH THE RIGID GRADE STRUCTURE.

POWERFUL FORCES FOR EDUCATIONAL CHANGE ARE CALLING FOR STRUCTURAL AS WELL AS INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENTS THAT ARE WHOLLY CONSISTENT WITH THE NONGRADED PHILOSOPHY.

THE RESTRUCTURING ARGUMENTS ALL LEND THEMSELVES TO MULTI-AGE PROGRAMS- TEACHER EMPOWERMENT, TEAMWORK, SITE-BASED DECISION MAKING, PROVIDING MORE FLEXIBLE ALTERNATIVES FOR STUDENTS, AND CONTINUOUS PROGRESS. NEVER BEFORE IN OUR HISTORY HAS THE GRADED SCHOOL, WITH ITS LOCKSTEP CURRICULUM AND COMPETITIVE-COMPARATIVE PUPIL EVALUATION SYSTEM COME UNDER SUCH ATTACK BY THOUGHTFUL EDUCATORS, POLITICIANS, AND BUSINESS PEOPLE.

ANOTHER POWERFUL FORCE IS THE "AGE OF INFORMATION", IN WHICH WE LIVE. WE HEAR ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY. CNN, CD-ROMS. INTERNET, TECHNOLOGY OF

ALL SORTS DOUBLE AND TRIPLE INFORMATION AT A SPEED WITH WHICH SCHOOLS CAN NOT POSSIBLY KEEP PACE.

TEACHERS CAN'T POSSIBLY TEACH STUDENTS ALL THE FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE THEY WILL NEED TO KNOW IN THEIR LIVES. IN THE EARLY 1800'S WHEN THE GRADED SCHOOLS TOOK HOLD, IT WAS POSSIBLE FOR A TEACHER TO TEACH ALL OF THE KNOWLEDGE NECESSARY FOR A STUDENT TO LEARN.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS

THEN WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL? WE MAINTAIN THAT WORKERS AND CITIZENS WILL NEED TO KNOW HOW TO LEARN, HOW TO THINK CRITICALLY, HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY, AND HOW TO SOLVE PROBLEMS AS THEY ARISE.

WE ARE USING THE MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS TO RESTRUCTURE OUR SCHOOLS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR STUDENTS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY. WE FEEL THE PHILOSOPHY AND STRUCTURE OF THE MULTI-AGE CLASSROOM IS CONDUCIVE TO OUR NEEDS..,

OTHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION THAT HAVE EMBRACED THE PHILOSOPHY AND SEE THE BENEFITS OF MULTI-AGE IN RESTRUCTURING EFFORTS INCLUDE: THE CANADIAN PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA AND THE STATES OF KENTUCKY AND OREGON. THESE LARGE DISTRICTS HAVE MANDATED THE CHANGE. INDIVIDUAL DISTRICTS ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE UNDERGOING SIMILAR TRANSFORMATION.

WHAT MULTI-AGE PROGRAMS ARE NOT

MULTI-AGE PROGRAMS DIFFER FROM *SPLIT GRADE* PROGRAMS WHERE STUDENTS OF USUALLY TWO AGES ARE COMBINED, BUT TAUGHT SEPARATELY IN THE SAME CLASSROOM AT THEIR TRADITIONAL GRADE LEVEL.

UNGRADED, NON-AGE GRADED EDUCATION, MULTI-AGE OR MIXED AGE GROUPING AND OPEN EDUCATION ARE SOME OF THE NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE PHILOSOPHY.

WE CALL OUR PROGRAM A MULTI-AGE OR MULTIAGE PROGRAM, SOMETIMES HYPHENATING AND SOMETIMES NOT. WE USE THE FOLLOWING DEFINITION:

THE MULTI-AGE CLASSROOM IS HETEROGENEOUS AND FLEXIBLE. IT FOLLOWS A CONTINUOUS PROGRESS MODEL, USING DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES, INTEGRATED/THEMATIC CURRICULUM AND HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES. ATTENTION IS GIVEN TO THE COGNITIVE, PHYSICAL, AESTHETIC, SOCIAL, AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF EACH CHILD. AUTHENTIC WORK AND AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT ARE ITS CORNERSTONES.

REASONS WHY THE FIRST WAVE OF MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS FAILED

IN 1959, JOHN GOODLAD AND ROBERT ANDERSON PUBLISHED THE NONGRADED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. IT OFFERED A RADICALLY DIFFERENT VIEW OF ORGANİZING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN THE POST SPUTNIK YEARS. GOODLAD AND ANDERSON QUESTIONED PROMOTION ISSUES; COMPETITIVE MARKING SYSTEMS; PUPIL PROGRESS REPORTING; HETEROGENEOUS VERSUS HOMOGENEOUS GROUPINGS; STUDENT PRODUCTIVITY AND TEST SCORES; COOPERATIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES. IN 1987, THEY REVISED THEIR WORK, INCLUDING A FIRST CHAPTER WHICH REVIEWS THE INTERVENING 30 YEARS. MOST OF WHAT THEY SAID STILL HOLDS TRUE TODAY. IT IS A MUST READ FOR ANYONE SERIOUSLY INTERESTED IN RESTRUCTURING IN THIS WAY.

THIS WORK COUPLED WITH INTEREST IN THE BRITISH INFANT SCHOOLS GAVE RISE TO MANY NONGRADED MODELS AROUND THE COUNTRY. HOWEVER, MOST OF THEM WERE SHORT LIVED FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

I. POOR DEFINITION AND MISUNDERSTANDING
SCHOOLS ADOPTED THE LABEL OF NONGRADED WHILE CHANGING LITTLE ELSE.

RESEARCH DID LITTLE TO CLEARLY DEFINE THE CRITERIA THEY WERE HOPING TO MEASURE.

WHERE CHANGES IN SUBSTANCE OCCURED THEY WERE THE WRONG CHANGES. FOR EXAMPLE MANY THOUGHT OPEN EDUCATION MEANT LITERALLY TEARING DOWN THE WALLS AND DISPERSING WITH STRUCTURE.

2. LACK OF TRAINING

IN BRITAIN, TEACHERS WERE TAUGHT DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES AND HAD OPPORTUNITIES TO PRACTICE IN MODEL CLASSROOMS

AMERICAN TEACHERS DISCOVERED THAT THE TIME REQUIREMENT AND SKILL NEEDED TO BE EFFECTIVE WERE SIMPLY NOT PART OF THEIR PRIOR TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE.

3. LACK OF SUPPORT

THE REST OF THE SYSTEM REMAINED ORGANIZED AROUND GRADING WHICH PLACED A DOUBLE BURDEN ON TEACHERS. FROM REQUIRED TESTING TO GRADED TEXTBOOKS, THE SCHOOLS WERE ORGANIZED TO COUNTER MULTI-AGE PRINCIPLES.

PLANNING TIME WAS NOT PROVIDED.

AN ENTHUSIASTIC ADMINISTRATOR WITH A STAFF NOT COMMITTED TO THE PROGRAM MEANT THAT WHEN THE ADMINISTRATOR LEFT....SO DID THE PROGRAM.

LACK OF SUPPORT FROM PARENTS AND COMMUNITY, DUE TO LITTLE EFFORT TO INVOLVE OR EDUCATE THEM.

BY THE 80'S- INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION AND NUMEROUS REPORTS CALLING FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FUELED A FULL FLEDGED "BACK TO BASICS" MOVEMENT.

ACADEMICS WERE PUSHED DOWN TO KINDERGARTEN. WATERED-DOWN FIRST GRADE WORK TOOK PLACE. DRILL WAS USED EXTENSIVELY. THERE WAS INCREASED RELIANCE ON STANDARDIZED TESTING.

RATIONALE FOR NEW EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT MULTI-AGE EDUCATION

IN RESPONSE TO INCREASED EMPHASIS ON ACADEMICS IN KINDERGARTEN, THE NAEYC (NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN) CREATED A POSITION PAPER OUTLINING DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES.

THE CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENTAL APPROPRIATENESS HAS TWO DIMENSIONS: AGE APPROPRIATENESS AND INDIVIDUAL APPROPRIATENESS.

1. AGE APPROPRIATENESS RESEARCH TELLS US THAT THERE ARE UNIVERSAL, PREDICTABLE SEQUENCES OF GROWTH AND CHANGE THAT OCCUR IN CHILDREN DURING THE FIRST NINE YEARS OF LIFE. THEY OCCUR IN ALL AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT-PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL AND COGNITIVE. TEACHERS WORKING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN MUST PREPARE THE ENVIRONMENT TO MEET DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF THE AGE GROUP.

2. INDIVIDUAL APPROPRIATENESS EACH CHILD IS A UNIQUE PERSON WITH AN INDIVIDUAL PATTERN AND TIMING OF GROWTH, AS WELL AS INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITY, LEARNING STYLE, AND FAMILY BACKGROUND. BOTH THE CURRICULUM AND ADULTS' INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN SHOULD BE RESPONSIVE TO INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES. LEARNING IN YOUNG CHILDREN IS THE RESULT OF INTERACTION BETWEEN THE CHILD'S THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCES WITH MATERIALS, IDEAS AND PEOPLE. THESE EXPERIENCES SHOULD MATCH THE CHILD'S DEVELOPING ABILITIES, WHILE ALSO CHALLENGING THE CHILD'S INTEREST AND UNDERSTANDING."

WE HAVE A BETTER RESEARCH BASE IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT THAN WE HAD IN THE 60'S- HOW CHILDREN LEARN TO READ, WRITE, LEARN AND THINK IS BETTER KNOWN TO US.

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BOARDS AND NAESP(THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS) HAVE JOINED THE NAEYC IN ENDORSING THE MOVEMENT.

ANOTHER BIG FACTOR IS THAT WE HAVE GREATER KNOWLEDGE OF AND AWARENESS OF THE PROCESS OF CHANGE ITSELF.

GOODLAD AND ANDERSON POINT OUT THAT SCHOOL ORGANIZATION IS PART OF ITS TIME AND CULTURAL MILIEU. CHANGES HAVE OCCURRED IN AMERICAN SOCIETY THAT MAKE NONGRADED EDUCATION MORE APPROPRIATE. IN LIGHT OF THE INCREASING

DIVERSITY OF THE POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES, THE EMPHASIS ON INDIVIDUALITY HAS MORE ADVANTAGES THAN A PROGRAM THAT IS BASED INCREASINGLY ON LESS ATTAINABLE HOMOGENEITY.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN BY DOING

SWISS PSYCHOLOGIST, JEAN PIAGET, IDENTIFIED FOUR MAJOR STAGES IN CHILDREN'S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT-SENSORIMOTOR, PREOPERATIONAL, CONCRETE OPERATIONAL AND FORMAL OPERATIONAL. DAVID ELKIND TELLS US THAT CHILDREN FROM ALL CULTURES PASS THROUGH THESE STAGES. AT ALL STAGES CHILDREN "ACTIVELY CONSTRUCT REALITY OUT OF THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH THE ENVIRONMENT" BETWEEN AGES 6 AND 9, CHILDREN BEGIN TO MOVE FROM PREOPERATIONAL TO CONCRETE OPERATIONAL.

PRIMARY AGE CHILDREN ARE PHYSICALLY UNABLE TO ENDURE LONG PERIODS OF INACTIVITY. BECAUSE OF THE IMMATURITY OF THE FRONTAL LOBE OF THE BRAIN, SITTING QUIETLY REQUIRES A CONSCIOUS EFFORT MORE FATIGUING THAN RUNNING OR JUMPING.

CHILDREN LEARN AT DIFFERENT RATES

GOODLAD AND ANDERSON SAY THAT CHILDREN ENTERING FIRST GRADE, DIFFER IN MENTAL AGE BY APPROXIMATELY FOUR FULL YEARS, AND THE SPAN INCREASES AS THEY GET OLDER

LEARNING STYLES DIFFER

HOWARD GARDNER'S PROJECT ON HUMAN POTENTIAL AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY, HAS DRAWN ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL, BIOLOGICAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH TO DEVELOP HIS THEORY OF MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES. IN ADDITION TO THE LINGUISTIC AND MATHEMATICAL/LOGICAL INTELLIGENCES WHICH OUR WESTERN CULTURE USUALLY CONSIDERS TRADITIONAL INTELLIGENCES, HE HAS IDENTIFIED FIVE OTHERS: MUSICAL, SPATIAL, BODILY-KINESTHETIC, INTERPERSONAL AND INTRAPERSONAL INTELLIGENCES. IF A STUDENT'S PRIMARY INTELLIGENCE IS ONE OF THE FIVE LESS VALUED, HE IS SHORTCHANGED IN TRADITIONAL

EDUCATION. AN IDEAL CURRICULUM SHOULD GIVE STUDENTS AN OPPORTUNITY IN ALL SEVEN OF THE INTELLIGENCES.

THE WHOLE CHILD LEARNS IN AN INTEGRATED FASHION

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PREMISES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IS THAT ALL DOMAINS OF DEVELOPMENT- PHYSICAL, SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE- ARE INTEGRATED, STATES THE NAEYC POSITION PAPER.

RESEARCH ON THE HUMAN BRAIN HAS FOUND THAT INFORMATION TAUGHT IN MORE MEANINGFUL CONTEXT IS MORE EASILY LEARNED THAN ISOLATED FACTS AND MUCH MORE INFORMATION CAN BE TRANSMITTED THIS WAY.

ELKIND DESCRIBES THE LEARNING OF YOUNG CHILDREN AS "PERMEABLE". CHILDREN DON'T DIVIDE KNOWLEDGE INTO SEPARATE CATEGORIES- READING, MATH, ETC. RATHER THEIR THINKING IS ORGANIZED AROUND PROJECTS, ACTIVITIES AND FRAMES. IN THE COURSE OF EACH PROJECT, WHICH IS MEANINGFUL TO EACH CHILD, SKILLS AND INFORMATION OF ALL KINDS ARE LEARNED MUCH MORE EFFECTIVELY THEN IF THE COMPONENTS HAD BEEN ISOLATED.

EMOTIONS AFFECT LEARNING

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN MUST BE SECURE AND NONCOMPETITIVE. A STATE OF "RELAXED ALERTNESS" SHOULD BE CREATED. BLOOM AND ASSOCIATES CONCLUDED THAT CHILDREN WHOSE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES WAS PLEASURABLE WERE MORE DILIGENT AND ACHIEVED GREATER SUCCESS IN THEIR CAREERS. ALL CHILDREN NEED AN EXCITEMENT ABOUT AND AN ENTHUSIASM FOR LEARNING. SKILLS ARE MORE EASILY LEARNED WHEN THE MOTIVATION IS THERE.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ABOUT MULTI-AGE PROGRAMS

RESEARCH SAYS THAT MULTI-AGE PROGRAMS HAVE ADVANTAGES FOR PRIMARY-LEVEL STUDENTS AS WELL AS TEACHERS.

IN THE PAST, AS WELL AS TODAY, CHILDREN'S PLAY GROUPS ARE MADE UP OF MIXED AGES IN ALL CULTURES. ONE STUDY OF URBAN CHILDREN DONE IN 1981, FOUND CHILDREN WERE OBSERVED PLAYING WITH THEIR PEERS ONLY 6% OF THE TIME; 55% OF THE TIME THEY ASSOCIATED WITH CHILDREN A YEAR OR MORE OLDER OR YOUNGER, AND 28% OF THE TIME WITH ADULTS. LILLIAN KATZ ASKS, "IF CHILDREN SPONTANEOUSLY FORM HETEROGENEOUS GROUPS, WHY DO ADULTS TYPICALLY SEGREGATE THEM BY AGE?"

IN OTHER STUDIES. CHILDREN IN SAME AGE GROUPS WERE FOUND TO BE MORE AGGRESSIVE THAN CHILDREN IN MULTI-AGE GROUPS. COOPERATION IS FOSTERED IN CHILDREN OF MULTI-AGE GROUPS BECAUSE CHILDREN HAVE DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS OF THOSE YOUNGER AND OLDER THEN THEMSELVES. PRIMARY AGE CHILDREN PERCEIVE YOUNGER CHILDREN AS MORE IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE AND OLDER CHILDREN AS MORE ABLE TO PROVIDE LEADERSHIP.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL BENEFITS :

OLDER CHILDREN TAKE A GREATER ROLE IN DIRECTING AND ORGANIZING PLAY WHICH MEANS THEY GET TO PRACTICE AND IMPROVE IN LEADERSHIP SKILLS.

YOUNGER CHILDREN GAIN OPPORTUNITIES TO JOIN MORE COMPLEX PLAY THAN THEY COULD INITIATE THEMSELVES, AND TO IMPROVE THEIR SOCIAL SKILLS IN INTERACTING WITH MORE MATURE PLAYMATES.

AT-RISK, ISOLATED OLDER CHILDREN CAN GAIN GREATER SOCIAL SUCCESS WHEN PAIRED WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN. ALSO, OLDER CHILDREN WHO HAVE DIFFICULTY FOLLOWING THE RULES BECOME MORE SUCCESSFUL IN CONTROLLING THEIR OWN BEHAVIOR WHEN THEY ARE ASKED TO REMIND YOUNGER CHILDREN TO OBEY.

COGNITIVE BENEFITS:

YOUNGER CHILDREN HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN FROM OLDER CHILDREN AS WELL AS FROM THE TEACHER; VOCABULARY IS

LEARNED MORE RAPIDLY AND THEY ARE INTRODUCED TO MORE AD 'ANCED PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS EARLIER.

MORE ADVANCED STUDENTS WORKING IN HETEROGENEOUS LEARNING GROUPS SCORE HIGHER ON RETENTION TESTS THAN DO HIGH ACHIEVERS WHO PARTICIPATE IN COMPETITIVE OR INDIVIDUALISTIC LEARNING SITUATIONS, SAYS A STUDY FROM JOHN HOPKINS.

PEER TUTORING PRODUCES ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT FOR BOTH PARTIES- FOR THE TUTORS, INCREASED SELF-CONFIDENCE AND IMPROVED ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL.

BENEFITS FOR TEACHERS:
THE ATMOSPHERE OF COOPERATION AND THE INCREASE IN PROSAIC BEHAVIOR CAN SUBSTANTIALLY REDUCE DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS. ALSO, WHEN OLDER CHILDREN GIVE HELP TO YOUNGER CHILDREN, IT FREES THE TEACHER TO GIVE INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION WHERE IT IS NEEDED.

SUMMARY OF STUDIES COMPARING GRADED AND NONGRADED EDUCATION

STUDIES COMPARING GRADED AND NONGRADED CLASSES ARE EITHER INCONCLUSIVE OR FAVORABLE TO NONGRADED PROGRAMS.

IN 1977, PAVAN REVIEWED 37 STUDIES REPORTED BETWEEN 1968 AND 1976. THE RESULTS FAVORED MULTI-AGE IN TERMS OF BOTH STANDARDIZED ACHIEVEMENT TEST SCORES AND IN TERMS OF STUDENTS' ATTITUDE ABOUT SCHOOL. THE EFFECTS WERE MORE MARKED THE LONGER THEY WERE IN MULTI-AGE PROGRAMS. MULTI-AGE WAS SEEN AS "PARTICULARLY BENEFICIAL IN TERMS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH FOR BLACKS, BOYS, UNDERACHIEVERS, AND STUDENTS OF LOWER SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS."

PRATT REVIEWED 30 STUDIES AND FOUND NO SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE IN TERMS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT BUT FOUND STUDENTS WITH BETTER SELF CONCEPT AND A MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDE ABOUT SCHOOL.

MILLER(1989) REVIEWED 21 STUDIES AND FOUND RESULTS SIMILAR TO PRATT. MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS ARE *AS EFFECTIVE* AS SINGLE-GRADE CLASSROOMS IN TERMS OF ACHIEVEMENT, AND *SUPERIOR* IN TERMS OF STUDENT AFFECT.

GOODLAD AND ANDERSON SAY, "THERE IS SIMPLY NO RESEARCH THAT SAYS GRADED STRUCTURE IS DESIRABLE.

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

OUR SUPERINTENDENT HAD WANTED TO IMPLEMENT MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS FOR A LONG TIME. WE WERE BOTH PRODUCTS OF THE 60'S AND 70'S AND HAD A SIMILAR PHILOSOPHY ABOUT EDUCATION AND HOW CHILDREN SHOULD BE TAUGHT AND WHAT OUR IDEAL SCHOOL WOULD LOOK LIKE IN TERMS OF THE WAY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS INTERACTED, AND THE ROLE PARENTS SHOULD PLAY. BUT NOTHING SEEMED TO BE BROKEN IN THE SCHOOL, SO WHY FIX IT?

PARENTS SEEMED HAPPY, ALTHOUGH IN A RECENT PARENT SURVEY I HAD PERCEIVED THE FIRST RUMBLINGS OF DISSATISFACTION AND A DESIRE FOR CHANGE

THERE WERE MANY VETERAN STAFF MEMBERS WHO HAD BEEN TRAINED IN A DIFFERENT TIME AND WHO HAD BEEN MEETING WITH SUCCESS. SUCCESS BEING THE EQUIVALENT OF EXCELLENT STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES.

I WAS LEERY TO SAY THE LEAST. WHAT KIND OF WORK WOULD IT MEAN FOR ME? HOW WOULD I ENLIST TEACHERS? WHAT KIND OF WORK WOULD IT MEAN FOR THEM? WHICH TEACHERS? WHICH GRADES? HOW MANY? HOW WOULD PARENTS BE INFORMED? WHICH STUDENTS SHOULD BE INCLUDED? WHERE DO I BEGIN? **CHANGE IS HARD!**

I BEGAN BY LOOKING AT WHAT KINDS OF THINGS WE WERE ALREADY DOING THAT MIGHT LEND THEMSELVES TO THE TRANSITION.

SOME OF OUR STAFF HAD BEGUN TO ESPOUSE WHOLE LANGUAGE AS A WAY TO TEACH READING AND THE LANGUAGE ARTS. THEY WERE ALSO INTO "MATH THEIR WAY' WHICH IS A MANIPULATIVE BASED MATH PROGRAM.

WE HAD JUST REVISED THE SCIENCE CURRICULUM TO INCLUDE A FEW BASIC SCIENCE OBJECTIVES TAUGHT THROUGH THEMES AT EACH GRADE LEVEL. THE OBJECTIVES INCLUDE SKILLS SUCH AS OBSERVING, USING SPACE/TIME RELATIONSHIPS, CLASSIFYING, INFERRING, INTERPRETING DATA AND THE LIKE. WE DID NOT PURCHASE A TEXTBOOK OR WRITE A LENGTHY CURRICULUM GUIDE, RATHER WE DEVELOPED A ONE PAGE CHART WHICH CLEARLY DELINEATED THEMES FOR EACH GRADE LEVEL AND A THREE RING BINDER WITH ALL TYPES OF SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING THE TOPIC. MANY SCIENCE SKILLS WERE INTEGRATED WITH OTHER SUBJECT AREAS.

WE HAD ALSO DONE QUITE A BIT OF TRAINING IN COOPERATIVE LEARNING

AN EXPERIENCED FIRST GRADE TEACHER AND I HAD BEEN HAVING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT HER DISSATISFACTION WITH THE WAY WE WERE LOOKING AT THE REAL LITTLE ONES: REFERRING THEM FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION OR REMEDIAL SERVICES FOR UNJUSTIFIABLE REASONS. IF ONLY WE WOULD LOOK AT THEM IN A DEVELOPMENTAL FRAMEWORK WE WOULD SEE THAT CHILDREN DEVELOP AT THEIR OWN RATE AND THAT WE SHOULD LET THEM HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO MEET WITH SUCCESS IN THEIR OWN WAY AND TIME. WE HAD DISCUSSED THE CONCEPT MANY TIMES.

A JANUARY, 1990, EDUCATION DIGEST ARTICLE CALLED, "OPEN CLASSROOMS RECONSIDERED" CAUGHT MY EYE. IT TALKED ABOUT THE MERITS OF THE OPEN CLASSROOMS AND I BEGAN THINKING ABOUT HOW IMPRESSED I HAD BEEN WITH THE BEST OF THOSE CLASSROOMS I HAD VISITED IN THE EARLY '70'S. OF COURSE, THEY HAD BEEN LEAD BY SUPERB AND GIFTED TEACHERS. THEY WERE SOME OF THE BEST CLASSROOMS I HAD EVER SEEN; WHERE CHILDREN WERE TRULY INVOLVED WITH THEIR WORK. I SENT THE ARTICLE AROUND TO THE STAFF AND ESPECIALLY MY FIRST GRADE TEACHER, AND BEGAN DISSEMINATING OTHER ARTICLES WHICH WOULD FURTHER THE CAUSE OF MULTIAGE CLASSROOMS. A SMALL GROUP OF INTERESTED TEACHERS BEGAN MEETING AND TALKING ABOUT MULTI-AGE.

THE SUPERINTENDENT ATTENDED A NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND RETURNED DETERMINED TO CREATE HIS MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS. HE BROUGHT BACK MATERIALS THAT HE PUT TOGETHER IN WHAT

HE CALLED A "STARTER KIT". IT INCLUDED BROCHURES AND INFORMATION FROM MULTI-AGE SCHOOLS AROUND THE COUNTRY, AS WELL AS GOOD RESEARCH ARTICLES ON THE TOPIC. PROBABLY THE MOST CONVINCING ITEM IN THE "STARTER KIT" WAS AN AUDIO TAPE OF ONE WOMAN WHO WORKED AT A SCHOOL IN A NATIONAL PARK THAT RESEMBLED THE ONE ROOM SCHOOL HOUSE. HER STORY WAS REMARKABLE! I REMEMBER LISTENING TO THIS TAPE ONE LATE WINTER DAY AS I TOOK MY FAST WALK AND THINKING THIS IS WHAT SCHOOL SHOULD BE.: STUDENTS AND TEACHER, WORKING TOGETHER TO SOLVE A PROBLEM. I STARTED TO THINK MAYBE WE CAN DO THIS. MAYBE WE CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN!

AN ARTICLE ABOUT A NEIGHBORING DISTRICT THAT WAS GEARING UP TO IMPLEMENT MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS APPEARED IN A LOCAL PAPER. IT PROMPTED ME TO CALL THE SCHOOL. THEY DIRECTED ME TO A SCHOOL IN MAINE THAT HAD MULTI-AGE PROGRAMS FOR 7 YEARS. I CALLED THEM, INVITED THE FOUR TEACHERS THAT WERE MOST INTERESTED AND WE VISITED THE SCHOOL.

THEIR MODEL INCLUDED CLASSROOMS WITH THREE YEAR SPAN: K-2, 3-5, AND 6-8 MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS. WE VISITED A K-2 AND A 3-5 ROOM AND TALKED WITH THE TEACHERS. THEY LOVED WHAT THEY WERE DOING AND WOULD NEVER GO BACK TO TEACHING THE "OLD WAY." THE CHILDREN SEEMED INVOLVED IN MEANINGFUL WORK AND HAPPY.

IT WAS OUR GOOD FORTUNE THAT A CONFERENCE PRESENTED BY THE SOCIETY FOR DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION ON MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS AND WHOLE LANGUAGE. WAS TAKING PLACE IN MANCHESTER, NH. TWO OF THE FOUR TEACHERS STOPPED OFF AT THE CONFERENCE IN NEW HAMPSHIRE FOR TWO DAYS AND RETURNED TO SCHOOL AFTER THE WEEKEND FIRED UP AND READY TO LEARN MORE.

ANOTHER PIECE OF LUCK, WAS THAT WE WERE THE SITE FOR AN OFF CAMPUS MASTER'S PROGRAM FROM ONE OF THE LEADING SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION IN THE BOSTON AREA, LESLEY COLLEGE. THE CONCENTRATION WAS LITERACY AND THE LANGUAGE ARTS. ALL FOUR OF THE INTERESTED TEACHERS WERE ENROLLED IN THE PROGRAM AND USED THE TOPIC OF MULTI-AGE FOR ONE OF THEIR RESEARCH PROJECTS. THEY BECAME KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT THE RESEARCH IN VERY SHORT ORDER. AND SO DID I. BECAUSE LETS FACE

IT, IF THE PRINCIPAL ISN'T SUPPORTIVE OF AN IDEA ITS JUST NOT GOING TO FLY.

MOST "HOW TO GUIDES" I HAVE READ CONCERNING IMPLEMENTING MULTI-AGE PROGRAMS RECOMMEND AT LEAST TWO YEARS TO PREPARE FOR IMPLEMENTATION. WE MADE THE TRIP UP TO MAINE ON APRIL 8 AND OPENED OUR FIRST MULTI-AGE CLASSROOM THAT FALL. WE WERE VERY LUCKY! MANY THINGS JUST SEEMED TO FALL INTO PLACE. OR MAYBE WE WERE JUST READY FOR IT.

WE DECIDED TO BEGIN WITH A TWO YEAR SPAN IN OUR CLASSROOMS. WE WOULD HAVE TWO 1/2 CLASSROOMS AND A DOUBLE 4/5. THE 1/2 TEACHERS HAD BEEN A FIRST AND A SECOND GRADE TEACHER. WE NEEDED ONE FROM EACH GRADE BECAUSE WE WERE NOT ADDING STAFF AND WE HAD TO BE SURE THAT WE WOULD HAVE ENOUGH SPACES FOR OUR STUDENTS. THIS CAN GET TRICKY.

THE DOUBLE 4/5 WAS MADE UP OF TWO TEACHERS WHO HAD BEEN TEACHING A DOUBLE CLASS OF FOURTH GRADERS IN AN OVERSIZED CLASSROOM. THEY SHARED BETWEEN 40 AND 45 STUDENTS IN THIS SELF CONTAINED CLASSROOM. THEY WERE INTERESTED IN THE PROPOSAL BECAUSE THERE WAS A "BUBBLE" OF CHILDREN IN THE INCOMING FIFTH GRADE AND IF THEY WANTED TO CONTINUE TO TEAM TEACH THIS WAS ONE OF THE WAYS THIS WOULD BE INSURED.

WE PRESENTED OUR PROPOSAL TO THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE IN LATE APRIL. THEY ENTHUSIASTICALLY SUPPORTED OUR EFFORTS AND ENCOURAGED US TO MOVE FORWARD.

JUST PRIOR TO OUR MEETING WITH THE COMMITTEE, I PRESENTED AN OVERVIEW OF OUR VISIT TO THE SCHOOL IN MAINE AND SOME BACKGROUND ON MULTI-AGE TO THE STAFF. THIS DID NOT GO AS WELL AS I WOULD HAVE LIKED. REMEMBER, I HAD TO BE VERY CAREFUL HOW I PRESENTED MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS. I COULDN'T COME OUT AND SAY THEY WERE **BETTER** THAN TRADITIONAL CLASSROOMS, AFTER ALL I HAD A ROOM FULL OF TRADITIONAL TEACHERS IN FRONT OF ME.

I MADE A NUMBER OF MISTAKES THAT DAY. BUT THE ONE I REMEMBER THE MOST VIVIDLY WAS WHEN I WAS TALKING ABOUT A MULTI-AGE SCHOOL I HAD READ ABOUT AND HOW IT HAD BEEN

CALLED THE "ACADEMY" WELL, ALL THE STAFF HEARD WAS THAT IF WE STARTED A PROGRAM LIKE THIS WE WOULD CALL IT THE "ACADEMY" AND THAT THEIR CLASSES WOULD BE COMPRISED OF THE LEFTOVERS.

THEY ALSO FELT WE HAD NOT GIVEN EVERYONE THE OPPORTUNITY TO GET INVOLVED ON THE FIRST ROUND OF IMPLEMENTATION. GOOD MORALE AND PAYING CLOSE ATTENTION TO SCHOOL CULTURE ARE IMPORTANT TO ME. I FELT TERRIBLE BUT KNEW I WOULD HAVE TO SOMEHOW GET THROUGH THIS AND CHIP AWAY AT SOME OF THE ATTITUDES THAT HAD BEEN FORMED AS WELL AS BEGIN GETTING PEOPLE INVOLVED WITH THE RESEARCH AND THE STRATEGIES THAT WOULD BE NEEDED IF WE WERE TO ALL COEXIST AS ONE SYSTEM.

THE NEXT STEP WAS TO TEST THE WATERS FOR PARENT SUPPORT. HOPEDALE IS A VERY SMALL COMMUNITY OF UNDER 6,000 RESIDENTS. WORD TRAVELS FAST AND EVEN BEFORE WE ANNOUNCED THE DATE OF OUR PARENT MEETING WE HAD PARENTS CALLING TO GET INFORMATION. THE NIGHT OF THE MEETING BROUGHT OUT MORE PARENTS THAN I HAD EVER SEEN AT A MEETING EXCEPT FOR OUR ANNUAL BACK TO SCHOOL NIGHT WHEN THE WHOLE TOWN TURNS OUT.

I DELIBERATELY CHOSE THE DOUBLE 4/5 CLASSROOM SO THAT IT WOULD GIVE THE PARENTS AN OPPORTUNITY TO LOOK AT THIS 'PRINT RICH' ENVIRONMENT WHERE SOME OF THE STRATEGIES OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS WERE ALREADY TAKING PLACE.

THE FOUR TEACHERS, THE SUPERINTENDENT AND MYSELF SPOKE ABOUT WHAT WE HOPED THE PROGRAM WOULD BE, OUR BELIEF IN ITS PHILOSOPHY AND OUR HOPE THAT IT WOULD BE ACCEPTED AND DESIRED BY THE PARENTS. WE TOLD THEM THAT WE WOULD STAY AND ANSWER EACH AND EVERY QUESTION THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE. ONE TEACHER PROMISED THE PARENTS THAT NO CHILD THAT WAS IN HER CARE WOULD FALL BETWEEN THE CRACKS. EVERY CHILD WOULD GET THE BEST FROM HER.

WE HAD DECIDED THAT ONLY CHILDREN WHOSE PARENTS CHOSE THE MULTI-AGE CLASSROOM WOULD BE PLACED THERE FOR THE FIRST YEAR. WE ALSO MADE THE MISTAKE OF TELLING THEM IT WOULD

BE FIRST COME, FIRST SERVED, BECAUSE AS I WAS TRYING TO LEAVE THE ROOM THAT NIGHT PARENTS WERE APPROACHING ME TO ENROLL THEIR CHILDREN.

EACH OF THE FOUR TEACHERS WAS HIGHLY REGARDED BY THE COMMUNITY AS FIRST RATE TEACHERS. PARENTS HAD BEEN REQUESTING THEIR CLASSROOMS FOR YEARS. (I HAVE SINCE DONE AWAY WITH PARENT REQUESTS I NOW USE A PARENT PLACEMENT FORM) THEY HAD MANY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AS TRADITIONAL TEACHERS. THEY WERE VERY COMFORTABLE WITH THE CURRICULUM AND WHAT THEY EXPECTED OF THE STUDENTS. THEY ALSO KNEW HOW TO MANAGE A CLASSROOM AND LARGE GROUPS OF STUDENTS. I NEVER THOUGHT FOR ONE MOMENT THAT THIS NEW VENTURE WOULD FAIL.

WE NEVER LABELED THIS PROGRAM A "PILOT" PROGRAM. PARENTS DON'T LIKE THEIR CHILDREN USED AS GUINEA PIGS. WE OFFERED THESE CLASSROOMS AS A CHOICE FOR PARENTS. AND CHOOSE IT THEY DID. THERE WAS A WAITING LIST AFTER ONLY TWO WEEKS AND THERE WERE RUMORS THAT YOU HAD TO "KNOW SOMEBODY" TO GET INTO THE CLASSROOM.

SUMMER CURRICULUM WRITING MINI GRANTS WERE OFFERED BY THE SUPERINTENDENT. THE FOUR TEACHERS EACH RECEIVED ONE AND WROTE CURRICULUM USING THE SCIENCE CURRICULUM TOPICS. THEY ORDERED ALL KINDS OF TRADE BOOKS. THEY ELIMINATED DESKS AND ORDERED TABLES TO BETTER FACILITATE COOPERATIVE LEARNING GROUPS. BOOK STANDS AND RACKS WERE ORDERED TO HOLD BOOKS. EASELS, ART SUPPLIES AND MATH MANIPULATIVES WERE BOUGHT. THEY LITERALLY WORKED ALL SUMMER TO GET THEIR ROOMS READY. ONE TEACHER SPENT TWO WEEKS JUST ARRANGING THE FURNITURE, SHE WOULD SET IT UP ONE WAY, CHANGE HER MIND, THEN RETURN TO SCHOOL AT NIGHT WITH HER HUSBAND TO REARRANGE IT. IT WAS EXHAUSTING FOR HER AND ME TOO.

FOR THE 1/2 TEACHERS, THE FIRST DAY WOULD BE THE DAY OF RECKONING. COULD READING REALLY BE TAUGHT WITHOUT THE BASAL READER? WHAT IF THE STUDENTS DIDN'T LEARN? THEY USED THE CHILDREN'S OWN WORDS AND INTERESTS AND GOT THE CHILDREN WRITING JOURNALS AND STORIES. THEY USED SMALL EASY TO READ BOOKS PUBLISHED BY THE WRIGHT GROUP AND

OTHERS. THE CHILDREN WERE THRILLED WITH THEIR WRITING. I WOULD WALK INTO A ROOM AND THEY WOULD BEG ME TO READ THEIR STORIES. THEY WERE LEARNING. READING SKILLS WERE TAUGHT WHENEVER NEEDED, BUT THE EMPHASIS WAS FAR FROM "DRILL AND KILL".

MY FAVORITE STORY IS ABOUT BOBBY WHO WAS, "HOW DO YOU SAY?" *ALL BOY.* HE HAD HAD A VERY UNHAPPY TIME IN KINDERGARTEN, ESPECIALLY ON THE BUS. HERE WAS A BOY WHO NEEDED ACTION AND SOME FREEDOM MIXED WITH A LOVING, FIRM HAND. TO GUIDE HIM. A TRADITIONAL FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM WOULD HAVE BEEN THE DEATH OF HIM. I WOULD HAVE HEARD HIS NAME ALL YEAR.

HIS PARENTS CAME TO SEE ME AT THE VERY END OF KINDERGARTEN, VERY CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT WOULD BECOME OF HIM. I SUGGESTED THE NEW MULTI-AGE CLASSROOM FOR HIM. THEY AGREED. HIS TEACHER AND I WATCHED HIM VERY CLOSELY FOR THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF SCHOOL. THERE WERE RUMORS OF HIS BEHAVIOR IN THE BATHROOM AND ON THE PLAYGROUND AND OF COURSE, THE BUS REMAINED SOMEWHAT OF A PROBLEM. BUT IN THAT CLASSROOM HE WAS A SMASH SUCCESS. THE DAY I ABSOLUTELY KNEW THAT GETTING STUDENTS TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN LEARNING WAS SOMETHING THAT I COULD ATTACH MEANING TO WAS THE DAY THAT BOBBY TOLD ME HE WAS GOING TO LEARN HOW TO READ BY READING ALL OF THE DR. SUESS BOOKS AND AS A MATTER OF FACT HE HAD READ GREEN EGGS AND HAM THE NIGHT BEFORE AND DID I WANT TO HEAR HIM READ IT. JUST LIKE THE "GRINCH WHO STOLE CHRISTMAS" MY HEART GREW THREE SIZES THAT DAY.

TEACHERS CONTINUED TO ATTEND CONFERENCES AND I WAS ABLE TO ENLIST THREE MORE TEACHERS. ONE OF THEM DID NOT COME AS EASILY AS THE OTHERS. SHE NEEDED A LOT OF COAXING AND HAND HOLDING. BUT IT WAS BECAUSE OF HER INSISTENCE THAT I PROVIDE HER WITH ADEQUATE TRAINING THAT I BROUGHT THE GRIFFIN CENTER FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT CENTER CONSULTANTS TO RUN A WEEK LONG, THREE CREDIT SUMMER INSTITUTE. WHEATON GRIFFIN AND HIS WIFE EILEEN ARE NATIONAL CONSULTANTS ON DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION.

MORE THAN TWO-THIRDS OF THE STAFF ATTENDED; MULTI-AGE AND SINGLE AGE ALIKE. I WANTED ALL OF THE STAFF TO BE FAMILIAR WITH THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE EDUCATION. I DIDN'T WANT TO CREATE A DIVISION WITHIN THE STAFF. IT WAS ALSO IMPORTANT FOR THE SINGLE AGE TEACHERS TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT WAS GOING TO TAKE PLACE IN THE MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS- THERE WERE TO BE NO MYSTERIES OR SECRETS.

WE WORKED TOGETHER THAT WEEK THINKING ABOUT OUR OWN LEARNING STYLES AND HOW IT IMPACTS ON OUR TEACHING STYLE. WE LEARNED: HOW OUR CHILDREN LEARN AND THE FORCES THAT AFFECT THEIR LEARNING; MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES, DEVELOPMENTAL PATTERNS, PACE OF LEARNING AND GROWTH, LEARNING STYLES AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES; HOW TO WRITE INTEGRATED CURRICULUM, WE PRACTICED WRITING IN TEAMS; WE LEARNED HOW TO DESIGN A CLASSROOM THAT WOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SPACE IN DIFFERENT WAYS, I.E.. MAKE USE OF LEARNING CENTERS; WE LEARNED ABOUT AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT. IT WAS A GREAT WEEK.

I RECOMMEND THIS CONCEPT OF A SUMMER WORKSHOP HIGHLY. A RELAXED AND COLLEGIAL ATMOSPHERE EXISTS. THE CONSULTANTS' FEE WAS PARTIALLY PAID FOR BY CHARGING TUITION TO OUT OF TOWN TEACHERS THAT ATTENDED.

IT IS OUR SECOND FULL YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION. WE HAVE ADDED TWO ADDITIONAL 1/2'S AND ONE 5/6. WE'VE BEEN STRUGGLING WITH GRADE THREE. DOES IT BELONG WITH THE ONES AND TWOS? OR IS IT THE BEGINNING OF THE INTERMEDIATE LEVEL? WE'VE DECIDED THAT THE 3'S WILL BE GROUPED WITH THE 4'S AND ELIMINATE THE 4/5.

WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF RENOVATING AND ADDING ON TO OUR BUILDING. IT WILL BE COMPLETE IN SEPTEMBER OF '96. AT THAT TIME WE HOPE TO HAVE CLASSROOMS WITH THREE YEAR SPANS. I WOULD LIKE TO POSSIBLY OFFER SOME TWO YEAR CLASSROOMS AND SOME THREE YEAR CLASSROOMS.

YOU MAY BE WONDERING WHAT KINDS OF STUDENTS DO WELL IN MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS OR ARE THERE ANY STUDENTS THAT SHOULDN'T BE IN THIS KIND OF A SETTING? IN OUR LIMITED

EXPERIENCE WE HAVE FOUND FEW CHILDREN THAT MAY NOT BENEFIT FROM THE EXPERIENCE. WE HAVE TRIED TO CREATE HETEROGENEOUS CLASSROOMS. THEY INCLUDE SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS, EMOTIONALLY TROUBLED STUDENTS, EQUAL NUMBERS OF BOYS AND GIRLS, EQUAL NUMBERS OF MINORITIES.

PROMOTION POLICIES- THIS MODEL IS A VERY GOOD ONE IF YOU DISLIKE RETENTION AS MUCH AS I DO. I'M NOT SAYING TO DO AWAY WITH IT COMPLETELY , BUT I DON'T KNOW OF ANOTHER SINGLE MORE DESTRUCTIVE INFLUENCE ON A CH9LD'S SELF ESTEEM THAN HAVING TO STAY BACK. AT LEAST NOT AFTER KINDERGARTEN OR POSSIBLY FIRST GRADE. WE INSIST ON THREE CRITERIA BEING MET BEFORE WE RETAIN A CHILD: HE/SHE MUST BE SMALL FOR HIS AGE/GRADE; HE/SHE MUST BE OF AVERAGE INTELLIGENCE AND THE PARENTS MUST BE COMPLETELY SUPPORTIVE OF THE IDEA.

WHAT ABOUT ASSESSMENT?- ASSESSMENT IS ONGOING. WE ASSESS THROUGH STUDENTS' JOURNALS, COOPERATIVE WORK, AND PROJECTS. WE STILL GIVE THE ITBS AT THE END OF GRADES 2-6. THIS WILL BE THE FIRST YEAR WE WILL NOT HAVE THE FIRST GRADERS TAKE IT. LAST YEAR WE HAD NO SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN THE RESULTS FROM OTHER YEARS. WE ALSO HAVE BEGUN TO LOOK AT PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT. TEACHERS CONFERENCE WITH CHILDREN ON A REGULAR BASIS AND WE ARE REVISING OUR REPORT CARD. WE WILL NO LONGER USE LETTER GRADES AND CHILDREN WILL SET GOALS WITH THEIR TEACHERS.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU WANT TO IMPLEMENT MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS?
READ! READ! READ!
TALK, DISCUSS WITH TEACHERS, FORM DISCUSSION GROUPS.
VISIT OTHER SCHOOLS WITH MULTI-AGE, TALK WITH THEM.
EDUCATE PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY
TRY TO INVOLVE ONLY THOSE TEACHERS WHO BELIEVE IN IT- WITHOUT THAT YOU ARE DOOMED TO FAILURE.
CHIP AWAY AT IT, DON'T GIVE UP, BUT BELIEVE IN IT YOURSELF FIRST.
BE SENSITIVE TO TEACHERS WHO HAVE BEEN TRAINED DIFFERENTLY,BUT REMEMBER, SCHOOLS ARE FOR THE CHILDREN- THINK ABOUT WHAT IS BEST FOR THEM FOLLOW YOUR OWN INSTINCTS BUT BE PREPARED TO WORK VERY HARD

DISADVANTAGES:

IT IS MUCH MORE WORK FOR TEACHERS- MUCH EASIER TO CORRECT WORKBOOKS THAT REVIEW JOURNALS.

PARENTS AND COMMUNITY NEED TO BE EDUCATED- MOST BELIEVE THAT BECAUSE THEY WERE TAUGHT IN GRADED SCHOOLS, THAT MUST BE THE BEST WAY, AFTER ALL, THEY'VE DONE OK. EVERYTHING ELSE IN SOCIETY CAN CHANGE, BUT NOT THE SCHOOLS.

DON'T TRY TO CHANGE EVERYTHING AT ONCE. WE CREATED THE CLASSROOMS AND THE CURRICULUM BUT WE'RE STILL WORKING ON THE REPORT CARD THAT HAS TAKEN US ABOUT THREE YEARS AND WE WILL PILOT OUR NEW ONE NEXT YEAR. TEACHERS IN OUR SYSTEM HAVE SAID THAT THE LAST TIME THEY CHANGED THE REPORT CARD THEY THOUGHT IT WAS GREAT UNTIL THEY HAD TO USE IT AND THEN THEY REALIZED IT WASN'T WHAT THEY EXPECTED. WE WILL TRY IT FOR A YEAR, GET PARENT AND TEACHER FEEDBACK, REVISE AND THEN HOPEFULLY WE WILL HAVE SOMETHING WE CAN USE FOR A WHILE.

PLANNING TIME NEEDS TO BE INCREASED. WE HAVE PROVIDED THE SUMMER GRANTS FOR PLANNING BUT ARE STILL STRUGGLING WITH THE PLANNING TIME. WE ARE HOPING THAT NEXT YEAR DURING OUR WEEKLY EARLY RELEASE WE WILL HAVE ONE OR TWO SESSIONS A MONTH THAT WILL BE OPEN FOR MULTI-AGE PLANNING AS WELL AS COLLABORATION TIME WITH SPECIAL ED TEACHERS.

DEVELOP YOUR OWN PROGRAM TO MEET YOUR OWN NEEDS. LOOK AT OTHER MODELS BUT CREATE ONE THAT FITS YOUR SCHOOL.

TEACHERS NEED TRAINING OR RETRAINING AND LOTS OF SUPPORT. THEY HAVE THEIR DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS AS DO THE CHILDREN. PERSONALLY, I HAVE FOUND KEEPING UP WITH THE TEACHERS' NEEDS AND DEMANDS ARDUOUS AT TIMES.

IT CAN BE COSTLY TO START UP- YOU WILL NEED TO BUY LOTS OF TRADE BOOKS AND MANIPULATIVES, TEACHERS MA NEED NEW/WANT NEW FURNITURE SUCH AS TABLES RATHER THAN DESKS. THEY WILL NEED TO BE TRAINED, ATTEND CONFERENCES, JOIN ASSOCIATIONS.

THERE ARE SIX KEY INSTRUCTIONAL DIMENSIONS IN WHICH MULTI-AGE TEACHERS DIFFER FROM SINGLE AGE TEACHERS: CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION, CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND DISCIPLINE, INSTRUCTIONAL ORGANIZATION AND CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY AND GROUPING, SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING, AND PEER TUTORING.

FINAL COMMENTS

IT HAS BEEN AN EXCITING TWO YEARS. I CAN SEE THE DIFFERENCE IN THE STUDENTS. THEY ARE HAPPY LEARNERS AND PROBLEM SOLVERS. THEY HAVE A SAY IN THE PACE OF THEIR EDUCATION, THERE IS LESS FRUSTRATION. THE TEACHERS ARE AMAZED WITH WHAT THE CHILDREN ARE CAPABLE OF DOING. THERE ARE FEWER DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS, PLEASED PARENTS AND REJUVENATED TEACHERS. WE HAVE CREATED A SCHOOL THAT HAS PLACED THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE STUDENT AT THE CORE OF EVERY DECISION WE MAKE. I AM A PROUD PRINCIPAL.

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